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High Blood Pressure can lead to Heart Disease

It is estimated that one in four adults (approximately 50 million) in the United States has elevated blood pressure – and more than 30 percent of them are unaware of it. Since people with hypertension may not exhibit any symptoms, their high blood pressure is often undiagnosed until complications occur. Regular blood pressure screening can facilitate early diagnosis and treatment and reduce the risk of further complications associated with hypertension.

Blood pressure

Blood pressure is the force exerted against artery walls as blood is carried through the circulatory system. The measurement of force is made in relation to the heart's pumping activity, and is measured in millimeters of mercury (mmHg). The top number, or systolic pressure, is the measurement of pressure that occurs when the heart contracts or beats. The bottom number, or diastolic pressure, is the measurement recorded between beats, while the heart is relaxed. The systolic number is placed over the diastolic number and is always the higher of the two numbers. For example, 110/70 (read as 110 over 70).

Elevated levels

Hypertension indicates that the force required for blood flow is greater than normal. According to the Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Detection, Evaluation and Treatment of High Blood Pressure (JNC VII), a blood pressure measurement of less than 120/80 mmHg is considered normal; 120-139/80-89 mmHg indicates prehypertension; 140-159/90-99 mmHg is stage 1 hypertension; and greater than 160/at or greater than 100 mmHg is stage 2 hypertension. A diagnosis of hypertension is made when a person has had two or more elevated readings after the initial assessment.

JNC VII also found that in people over the age of 50, systolic blood pressure (BP) of more than 140 mmHg is a much more important cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factor than diastolic BP. The report also found that the risk of CVD, beginning at 115/75 mmHg, doubles with each increment of 20/10 mmHg and that people with normal blood pressure at the age of 55 have a 90 percent lifetime risk for developing hypertension.

(Source: The Seventh Report of the Joint National Committee on Prevention, Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Pressure.)



The vision of the Whitehall Cardiovascular Disease Task Force is to improve the heart health of all Whitehall residents.